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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Statement by Congressman Greg Walden**

**April 21, 2005**  
**House Committee on Agriculture**

**Hearing on the Secure Rural Schools and  
Community Self-Determination Act of 2000**

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Chairman Goodlatte, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the great success of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 and the need to reauthorize this critical legislation. The County Payments Law, as it is commonly referred has been a vital asset to America's rural counties since its enactment in 2001.

From Oregon to Florida, California to Maine, and points in between, counties across America are graced with the beauty of our national forestlands. These lands contribute a great deal to the scenic, commercial and economic ways of life for many Americans, especially in Oregon, where 13 federal forests and nine Bureau of Land Management districts which they call home.

Counties containing federal forestland are unable to generate tax revenue on these public lands which drastically reduces their tax base and budgets for critical services such as education and transportation infrastructure, the latter of which is vital if the federal lands are to be accessible for use and enjoyment.

For nearly a century, the federal government has recognized the need to offset this lost tax base. During much of the 1900s, sharing a percentage of federal timber receipts with affected counties worked well, all things being considered. However, we are all aware of the precipitous decline in federal timber sales during the last decade of the twentieth century, a decline that resulted in devastating reductions in receipts for counties containing federal forestlands.

Oregon was hit especially hard when timber receipts fell. Over fifty percent of my district, Oregon's Second, is public land, and 18 of the 20 counties I represent in central, southern and eastern Oregon were impacted with the decline in federal timber sales.

In the eastern part of my district for example, counties containing the Ochoco National Forest saw annual payments fall from \$10 million to \$309,000, an incredible 97 percent decrease over a seven year period. This is an insurmountable reduction to absorb, especially for rural counties already facing economic hardship with closures of mills and loss of jobs.

Responding to an urgent need, Congress passed and the President signed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act into law (PL 106-393) in 2001. The law provided a stable source of funding for counties containing federal forestland so they could provide basic services without fearing uncertain fluctuations in federal timber sales. I was proud to proudly support this Act.

Since its inception, the County Payments Law can be credited with:

- Providing students in rural communities with educational opportunities comparable to those in suburban or metropolitan areas;
- Contributing to the financial stability of over 4,400 rural schools and preventing the closure of numerous rural schools often located in isolated areas;
- Allowing over 780 transportation districts and road departments in rural counties to address severe backlog in maintenance projects that stemmed from budgets decimated during the 1990s;
- Strengthening the relationship between local governments, citizens, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service through the development of Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). So far, seventy RACs have studied and approved over 2,500 projects on federal forestlands. These projects include fuels reduction, habitat improvement, watershed restoration, road maintenance and rehabilitation, reforestation, campground and trail improvement, and noxious weed eradication;
- The development of over 230 Community Wildfire Protection Plans, 34 of which are in Oregon, that are identifying and prioritizing hazardous fuels reduction projects in federal forests;
- Programs for at-risk youth in Oregon, such as Union County's Training and Employment Consortium, educate youth on the importance of responsible forest management, establish a sense of pride for work done on public lands, and provide hope and guidance for kids who would otherwise be prone to crime.

Simply put, the County Payments Law is a success and represents government fairness in action. These are America's forestlands, and America has a commitment to them and the communities that help maintain their health, beauty and accessibility.

The time has come for Congress to renew its commitment to rural communities across the country by reauthorizing this important piece of legislation. On February 2, I was proud to introduce H.R. 517, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2005 along with you, Chairman Goodlatte, and Resources Committee Chairman Pombo, and many more colleagues from both sides of the aisle and across the country.

I look forward to working with this committee, the Congress and the President as we continue down this successful and responsible course of action.

Thank you.